II. Military Organization

701 An army, properly speaking, with cadres and hierarchies, did not exist among the Mossi.

721 In the event of war, the Tansoba or Tampsoba (war minister) notified the canton chiefs who promptly assembled with all their able-bodied men and as many horsemen as possible.

705 The villages were charged with feeding the soldiers.

III. Judicial Organization

692 693 Justice was rendered in conformity with local customs which had been handed down from generation to generation and according to local practice.

1. By village chiefs, assisted by some of the elders, for petty affairs, pilfering, and insults.

2. The canton chief, assisted by his court dignitaries and the minister, ruled on matters concerning theft, adultery, and bodily attacks, as well as on other matters.

3. The Mogho Naba took cognizance of all matters of general interest, especially with crimes of assassination and murder. In theory, he could by himself pronounce the death sentence on the [565] nakomsé [descendants of Mogho Naba]. Contrary to general belief, a [56] kombéré (canton chief) also had the power of life and death over his subjects. How many individuals have been put to 661 death merely because they were wealthy! How many village chiefs have been killed by the canton chiefs over their territories without any intervention by the Mogho Naba! The nakomsé could 565 be executed, however, only for very serious crimes, such as 684 adultery with a woman of the nobility. The guilty man was led 762 into the bush by old nakomsé; they gave him a rope with which he was expected to hang himself and thus expiate his crime.

694 Justice was free; no fee was expected or assessed. The plaintiff, 431 however, customarily presented the naba with a white or light gray rooster, accompanied by the traditional satchel containing from 200 to 1,000 cowries.

592 A typical soukala consists of the master's hut, a hut for each wife, one hut for the sheep and goats, another for the horse if he has one, a hut for the family mill, and, finally, a receiving hut with two doors sufficiently high to permit entrance without stooping and set sometimes as an entrance way and sometimes within the cluster of huts. All [351] these dwellings stand in a circle and are joined either by a cob wall or by /11/ mat fences taller than a man and held up by stakes. The master's hut, which usually stands beside the huts for the horses and sheep, is set off from the others by mats to insure his privacy. A low wall describes an arc within the inner courtyard; this is the kitchen when it is not raining. Big jars of fired clay which are used to brew [273 415] millet beer rest between the huts. In front of this cluster of huts, a shelter is built, usually high enough to permit standing and consisting basically of forked stakes with branches and séko resting upon them; this shelter serves as a refuge during the hot part of the day. Small boys and unmarried girls live with their mother, while older boys, servants, and slaves each have their separate huts which face the dwellings of the master and his wives.

The term yri or soukala covers this whole complex of structures. [591] Each soukala is a distinct unit, and, some time after they marry, the children build their own residence, set completely apart from that of their parents, often in another part of the village and sometimes in [361] another village altogether. The soukala stand fifteen to twenty meters apart, and, because of this, the villages, though adequately concentrated, cover a rather extensive area. The heads of cantons 342 place an ostrich egg at the peak of the roof on their own dwellings, [237] and some even build terraced huts higher than the surrounding dwell- [554] ings. They keep their riches in these huts and a prison in the base- [617] ment. An earthen stairway leads to the terrace where the master of [512] the house receives his guests when the sun begins to sink on the horizon.

● 721 These people, apparently so peaceful today, were formerly quite warlike and went off to war at the slightest pretext. Foreign to the land they now occupy, the Mossi must have conquered it by force of arms. The Tarik-es-Soudan /History of Sudan/ relates that the people of Yatenga seized Timbuktu in the fourteenth century, and in 721 the fifteenth they probably carried their incursions as far as Lake 701 Bébo and even Oualata. (4) The Mossi army was greatly feared.

4. Delafosse, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 80.

701 When a chief assembled his men, no one stayed behind. Only the
721 women, children, invalids, and old men guarded the villages. Those who had no horses formed the infantry; they were armed with bow
[411] and arrows, usually poisoned, and a large sword hung from the shoulder. The horsemen carried a sword and a spear that rested on the tip of the foot and was held at mid-height with the right hand. The Mossi
[643] cavalry was especially numerous and fearful. The Moro Naba stayed home when his people went to war. He gathered together as many horses as possible, and, when horsemen lost their mounts, they came to him to get another horse and rejoin the fight.

669 The last wars before the French conquest of Koupéla, which we shall describe briefly, were civil wars that took place either between the people of Tenkodogo and those of Koupéla, or between the Mossi and the Gourmantché.

669 /12/ As generally happened in parallel cases, these wars followed
643 the death of a naba, when several pretenders wrangled over the succession. It was in order to prevent such wars that only the immediate entourage of the naba was informed of his death. Outsiders were to remain in ignorance and believe the naba to be ill in his hut. The fatal news was spread only when the head of the family had gathered all that was necessary to honor the deceased in proper fashion by celebrating the kouré. (5)

5. Kouré, funeral ceremony in honor of the dead. See below.

669 When Naba Kidba died, leaving only a child of five or six to succeed him, a man from Kazem'bouanga who was powerful by virtue of his wealth and the number of his men decided to seize the throne. His followers had taken for themselves the name of Kazem'-bouanga and used to say: "Although the hyena (katré) is not the equal (zéma) of the donkey (bouanga), she nevertheless attacks and kills him if she meets him in the bush: similarly, although we are not as powerful as the inhabitants of Koupéla, we will manage to defeat them." And indeed, they marched on Koupéla. The prime minister, who bears the title, Saman'Naba (head of the outer courtyard), and whose own name was Wenkosgaraga, seized the child and fled with him to Sapara, the nearest village under the direct authority of the Moro Naba, located nine kilometers from Koupéla.

669 The last wars in the Koupéla area, therefore, were all civil wars that broke out upon the death of chiefs in the adjacent regions of Koupéla, Fada, and Tenkodogo.

721 The most usual theater of warfare, however, was Bousanga /Busansi/ country. If a Bousanga woman enslaved to the naba of Koupéla ran away, the naba demanded her return. If his request was turned down, this meant war. When the Mossi ran short of millet, when their herds had been decimated by an epizootic disease, or even simply when they wished to obtain slaves, the naba would assemble his ministers and direct them to raid the Bousansé. The Saman'Naba would take [701] charge of the war. The Trabana, an experienced warrior, acted as chief of staff, and all the other chiefs, heads of cantons and villages; assembled their men. This was a festive occasion, and its abolition is still lamented by many people, especially among the chiefs.

727 Everything was looted; the harvest and herds were shared, and the 567 population was reduced to slavery. Since we have mentioned slaves, we shall provide some details on the subject.

567 Slavery existed in Mossi country, but in a very mild form. The agricultural Mossi kept slaves to till their fields. It was to their advantage to treat them well and thus turn them to good account.

[435] Slaves constituted a source of wealth. An adult slave sold for 50 to 100 francs according to his strength, and no distinction was made between men and women. It was, therefore, unusual for a Mossi to kill a slave. Custom certainly sanctioned his right to do so, and no one, not even his chief, could call him to account for his act; his slave was his property, and he could do with him as he pleased. When he wished to get rid of a slave, however, he found it more lucrative to sell him. Besides, a slave should be attached to the household; a [278] maltreated slave might run away, even at the risk of being caught and in spite of the drug he was forced to drink, which, like the Lethean waters, was supposed to cause him to lose his memory. On the other hand, a well-treated, well-fed slave had the hope of obtaining a wife and becoming in turn the master of a hut. When his master was pleased with him, when he had rendered an important service, he was sometimes given one of the master's daughters in marriage; this made him free, and his children were not born slaves. Slaves could also be freed if their family agreed to redeem them. They were freed most frequently by means of an exchange: one of their daughters, sisters, or nieces was given in their place. This custom persisted until quite recently.

174 he entered into Bambarra. The inhabitants of Yenné saw him on the opposite shore of the Niger (2) before they had been told of his march.

2. Djenné is not right on the Niger nor on the Bani, but at a certain distance between the two rivers.

His flotilla joined him that same day, and, after having unloaded his provisions, he crossed the river with one part of his army and took Yenné by assault during the night. This exploit so frightened the Bambarra king that he asked for peace. He agreed to pay the victor an annual tribute of a certain number of slaves and to give back to the Gotto inhabitants all that had been taken away from them. (3)

521 648

3. This passage would indicate that the Dyoula of Gottogo (or Bondoukou), having some grievances against the Bambara of the Ségou region (assaulted peddlers, unpaid debts, etc.), went to the king of the Mossi to obtain justice, and that this might have been one of the causes of the war. There doubtless existed reciprocal grievances between Bambara and Mossi or between their natural allies.

Moussee /sic/ returned to Gotto in triumph, and he was proclaimed king. He gave his name to the capital."

As one can see, the important and valuable fact that must be extracted from this thick forest is the capture of Dienné by the king of the northern Mossi, the king of Yatenga (who at that time was Kango), during his struggles with the Bambara, that is, with Ngolo who was his contemporary. Because of his informants, who obviously did not 174 inform him with absolute precision and thus made him commit many 114 small errors or miscalculations, Mungo-Park embellished the true fact with imaginary details. First of all, there is the name of Kango, Moossie, Moussie /sic/, which is the name of the conqueror's country and not his own name. Then, the name of Gotto is given to the Mossi country, undoubtedly because of a confusion, either in the minds of the Blacks who informed Mungo-Park or in the mind of the great

778 whose ancestors had ruled the soil of the territory. In the name of
782 the Moro Naba, he entrusted him with the task of offering all those gifts to the Earth so that the latter might favor the sovereign. Ouagadougou Naba performed the sacrifice before the door of his soukala.

When the Moro Naba went to war, he also ordered the chief
● [721] of Ougadougou to perform a sacrifice to the Earth. The bara indicated what should be sacrificed in order to insure victory, to "break" the villages that were to be attacked.

782 When rain failed to come, the Moro Naba would go to the hillock at Koumbé /sic/-Padanda, and have the head of the quarter offer a sacrifice (beef, sheep, chicken) to secure rain. If rain refused to come, the bara were consulted once more, and sacrifices were offered until it came.

776 The Mossi also have a sky god whom they call Ounam as well
782 as Naba Ouendé or Naba Ouondé, meaning "Sun Chief." This is a
794 trace of the sun cult, which is unusual in Black West Africa, all opinions to the contrary notwithstanding. /590/ The majority of the Mossi sacrifice much more to ancestors and to the Earth than to Naba Ouondé, who is to them a somewhat remote god.

794 It must be added that Lieutenant Desplagnes found among the
782 Mossi an esoteric cult of the sun, moon, and fire, which is peculiar to religious initiates (Ouango) whom we shall mention later.

"The Hougho-Ouango of the Mossi (among the Mossi, those priests reside in the villages of Boujema, Mani, Kondogho, Yolo, and Tio) sacrifice to the sun in order to bind it to the Earth. They do this morning and evening, sunrise and sunset, during the first week of the winter season, and every six days in the morning at sunrise thereafter
[778] They also go to altars made of three conical stones and offer sacrifices and libations, always surrounded by the populace, family heads, drummers, and familial masks (ouango).

794 "Those priests tend the sacred fire throughout the year in a
372 small, highly adorned recess dug into one of their house walls. At
783 the end of the rainy season they will use it to light the great purifying bush fires.

794 "They perform sacrifices at every new moon, and they have
782 seven important feasts a year for their divinity. Finally, during the solar festivities, they use a cow's tail to tie down the sun to the earth and to bind its life-giving heat." (Le Plateau central nigérien /The Central Nigerian Plateau/, pages 275 and 276.)

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all the chaos would come a new appreciation for the task of the chief, and a cessation of the grumbling that the chiefs were greedy.

The Mossi interregnum also served another purpose. It gave the electors the opportunity to exhaust and redistribute much of the patrimony of the dead ruler, which was brought to them by his heirs who were trying to obtain the chieftainship through bribery. Sometimes, a candidate's ability to collect a great deal of goods with which to press his suit often revealed to the electors the strength of his following in the district or village, for had he been an unpopular man he would have had to use only his own resources.

The Mossi electors were always concerned with the health and character of a potential chief, and turned down the most promising candidates who were deficient in any of these qualities. For example, when Moro Naba Sanum died in 1890 without leaving a male heir, his younger brother, Bokary Koutou, was the strongest candidate for the *nam*. Yet he was passed over, at first, by the electors because of his reputation as a bandit and a rebel. We know from Captain Binger, a Frenchman who met Bokary in 1888, that this prince was indeed a bandit and a slave raider. But Binger, although deploring Bokary's conduct, exonerated him on the grounds that the Moro Naba had sent him into exile without any means of support. This was true, but the reason that Moro Naba Sanum did so was because Bokary had raised a rebellion against him as an attempt to obtain their father's position. Bokary was forbidden to appear in the capital; but when he heard that his brother Sanum was dead, he took a force of soldiers and hurried to Wagadougou fearing that an attempt would have been made to prevent his election. When he found that his fears were justified, he became desperate and secreted a force of Gurunsi warriors around the elector's meeting place, threatening to kill them if he was not named Moro Naba. They succumbed to his threat and he received the *nam*. During the customary speech in which a new ruler chose his official name, announced his program for the people and the country, or ridiculed his erstwhile competitors, Bokary Koutou said: "A hundred ghosts cannot frighten an elephant (Wobogo)," meaning that he was not afraid of any of his enemies. He thereafter became known as Moro Naba Wobogo, and he chose to live up to his boast when the French arrived and asked him to sign a treaty of protection with them. He refused

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and chose to fight, and when defeated, fled to the Gold Coast (Ghana). From here he intrigued with the British against the French and even succeeded in having his brother poisoned for accepting the title of Moro Naba. It was only when the British accepted French sovereignty over Mossi country that Bokary accepted his deposition and permanent exile.

Once the traditional electors had chosen one of Bokary's younger relatives, Siguiri as Moro Naba, the Mossi people themselves quietly accepted French rule. Their behavior was in this respect similar to that of many indigenous populations with complex political institutions who had been conquered by the Europeans. In contrast, the neighboring Dogon, Gurunsi, and Lobi, whose political systems were very simple, and who had been constantly raided by the Mossi for slaves, kept on rebelling against French rule, and in some cases shot poisoned arrows at French tax collectors and labor recruiters as late as 1941. The only opposition which they offered the French was in 1910 when an attempt was made to reorganize the Mossi districts for administrative reasons. However, when the French changed their policy of direct administration to a form of indirect rule, the Mossi remained so peaceful that by 1922 there was only one administrator for every 60,000 inhabitants.

Moro Naba Kom who reigned from 1905 to 1942 skillfully preserved the power of the ruling dynasty during a period when the Mossi people were subjected to a rather severe forced labor regime. This was also a period during which the administration deposed chiefs who ran afoul of its wishes or policies. The political ability of this ruler is best exemplified by the order of succession that occurred in the Doulougou district. In 1895 Moro Naba Wobogo had appointed his own son as Doulougou chief in place of Koabga Wedraogo whom he had deposed and killed. However, when Wobogo fled from the French the next year, his son, the Doulougou chief, killed himself because he did not wish to follow his father into exile. The new Moro Naba Siguiri placed a son of the former district chief, Koabga Wodraogo, as chief of Doulougou. This chief died in 1906 and was replaced by a brother. Unfortunately this chief ran afoul of the French, was deposed and placed in "obligatory residence" in another district where he died in 1927. The Moro Naba then elected another son of ex-

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VI

WARFARE

THE Mossi were proud of their warrior tradition, which had earned them their several kingdoms, principalities, and districts. Even the least district chief had stories about the wars in which his ancestors had wrested their territories from aboriginal populations. These traditions of conquest legitimized to a large extent the power of the Mossi kings and chiefs, who never hesitated to use force in order to obtain tribute, to maintain their rule, and to enforce their authority. The Mossi value fighting ability so highly that even today, when fighting is no longer necessary, most Mossi males in the rural areas carry sticks and other weapons on their shoulders as symbols of manhood. In their view, every man should know how to fight and should be able to defend his village, his district, and his kingdom.

According to tradition, the northward thrust of the Mossi warriors during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries carried them into the region of the Niger River bend. Here, around A.D. 1329, the Yatenga Mossi attacked and sacked the town of Timbuktu, which belongs to the Mali. When Mali was on the decline during the early fifteenth century, the Mossi again attacked its towns. According to the *Tarikh es-Sudan*, when the Mali ruler appointed Amin-ben-Ahmad jurisconsul of Timbuktu,

> the sultan of the Mossi led an expedition against Benka. The population of that region went out to engage the enemy, and at that time left others sitting around El Hadj. He pronounced certain words on the millet which was being served and asked those around him to eat of it. All of them ate except the son-in-law of El Hadj, who did not because he was related to him. "Now go and fight," said the holy man, "and you will have nothing to fear from the weapons of the enemy." All, in effect, returned safe and sound, and only those persons who did not eat the millet died in the battle. The king of the Mossi was routed, and his troops were chased without having seized anything from the people of Benka. All this thanks to the protection of the blessed person.[1]

Later, the Mossi attacked towns of the Songhai empire whenever they felt strong enough, only to be driven away later by a stronger adversary. Sa'di describes a Mossi incursion into the Songhai empire as follows:

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ancestors who were in the other world. Accompanied by his ministers, he went to the temple of the idol of the country. The learned holy man went there also, in order to see how one went about consulting the dead. They began by making the customary offerings; then a very old man appeared. At his appearance everyone prostrated himself and then the king announced the object of his visit. Calling upon the names of the ancestors, the old man said: "I will never agree to this step for you. On the contrary, you must fight until you or they die to the last man."

Then Na'asira replied to the mallam: "Return to your master and tell him that between us there will be only war and combat." Remaining alone in the temple with the personage who appeared in the form of an old man, the mallam questioned him in these words: "In the name of God Almighty I ask you to declare who you are." "I am Iblis [Satan]," replied the deceiving old man; "I have led them astray so that they will all die in a state of unbelief."

Mour returned to prince Askia-El-Hadj-Mohammed and reported all which had come to pass. "Now," he added, "your duty is to fight them." Straightway he launched his war against them, killed a number of their men, devastated their fields, plundered their habitations, and took their children into captivity. All of the men and women who were taken away as captives were made the object of divine benediction [converted to Islam]. In the entire country, no other expedition outside of this one had the character of a holy war made in the name of God.[6]

The rulers of the Songhai appear to have kept up their attacks on the Mossi during the following hundred years. One of them, Askia Daoud, launched an expedition against the Mossi in 1549 to celebrate his accession to the throne. He attacked and defeated them again in 1561 while on his way to attack Bornou, and their ruler "abandoned the country with all his troops."[5] After this and several other crushing defeats, the Mossi refrained from attacking Songhai territory. Their ardor for external adventures apparently cooled after this period, and there are no reports of their fighting anyone else except the Bambara of Segou in the eighteenth century.[6] Of course, Mossi chiefs made local forays among smaller neighboring groups such as the Busansi, Gurunsi, and Samogo, but only to catch slaves.

During the nineteenth century—a rather chaotic period in the western Sudan—the Mossi appear to have been immune from outside attacks. Crozat, who visited them in 1890, states: "From the very first, in Mossi country, one feels that one has entered a new land, more peaceful, richer, and more populous [than other African countries he had visited]. . . . The people one meets on the roads are workers on their way to the fields, or are carrying wares to the neighboring market. They are not like the Songhai and the Bobo, who always carry bows on their shoulders."[7] The immunity of the Mossi from attack by such intrepid nineteenth-century

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who fought the villagers of other districts over stray livestock, stolen goods, and runaway women, in that order of frequency.

The main reason for these inter-village wars was the lack of local mechanisms (aside from meetings of district chiefs) to deal with problems between villagers of different districts. If the district chiefs refused to meet, they could either refer the matter to the provincial level or allow the villages to resolve the problem among themselves. Many district chiefs preferred the latter course because it saved them from interference by the authorities in the capital. Besides, these problems were usually unimportant and did not pit one entire district against another. People of different districts were often bound to each other by familial and ritual ties, and did not like to fight against relatives. Only when the potential combatants were unrelated or all attempts at reconciliation failed would the people of a village (and occasionally of a district) band together, either secretly without their chiefs or under their chiefs, and go to war. In such cases, persons who had relatives in the enemy villages often remained at home.

The inhabitants of Mossi districts did band together eagerly under their chiefs to participate in slave-raiding expeditions into non-Mossi territories. This type of warfare seems to have been fairly common. Ruelle writes, "Before our [French] occupation, warfare was the chief preoccupation of the chiefs. Moreover, expeditions into Gurunsi country had as their goal pillage and the procurement of slaves for sale."[22] Similarly, Mangin states, "The Gurunsi and Busansi were frequently raided with the sole intent of obtaining slaves."[23] Binger gives the following description of a Mossi slave-catching expedition and the subsequent disposal of the slaves:

> During my second stay at Banema, Boukari [later Mogho Naba Wobogo], knowing my aversion to pillage and slavery and fearing to displease me, sent off two expeditions during the night without warning me—one to Nabouli, and the other towards the south to Baouer'a. By six o'clock in the morning of the following day, the returning horsemen were heralded by gunshots. Soon afterwards, a line of slaves of both sexes appeared, tied to each other by a cord slung around their necks. The expedition to Nabouli brought back seventeen slaves; that to Baouer'a brought only five, along with an ass laden with salt and a little cotton. As soon as these unfortunate people arrived, they were given water to drink, and mallets were used to remove the rings and copper bracelets which they wore on their arms and legs. Then they were classified into three categories:
>
> 1. The men formed a lot destined for immediate sale for fear that they should run away. They were led forthwith to Sakhaboutenga, to be exchanged against sorghum for the horses, millet for the personnel, and gunpowder.
> 2. A second lot, composed of women, was kept as a reserve to trade for horses.

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3. Finally, a third lot, composed of young girls and young boys, was distributed among the warriors and put into their charge. The boys will be employed until further notice as grooms to the warriors; later on, those who prove themselves useful and docile will be kept. The others will be sold at the first opportunity. The girls will be given in marriage to warriors who distinguish themselves.[24]

The military campaigns of the Mossi, in contrast to their slave-raiding expeditions, appear to have been well organized. When the Mogho Naba felt that a war was necessary, he summoned his five provincial ministers and the Tansoba to a parley. If war was decided upon, the Tansoba was given full charge of all operations. This man, chosen from a hereditary clan of warriors who lived in a village called Tansob'tenga in Sapone district, was listed among the Mogho Naba's courtiers but seldom appeared at court unless war was imminent. His duties as chief warrior were considered so dangerous that he constantly sought out religious practitioners for supernatural aid. Nevertheless, a war minister who was good and brave was not expected to live very long. If he did live to become gray-haired, the other courtiers made fun of him by pretending that his graying head could only be the result of his having carried a sheep captured in warfare on his head as a present to the ruler.

Once given a mandate for war, the Tansoba collected his magico-religious apparatus and prepared the requisite sacrifices. He then asked the provincial ministers to notify the district chiefs to assemble with their warriors under the leadership of the local Tansobadamba, who were often members of the Tansoba clan. When the district chiefs received this notice, they beat their *songagondo* (war drums), and the local administrators sent orders for men to the village chiefs. The village chiefs, in turn, beat their war drums to summon their noble cavalrymen and commoner foot soldiers, who came armed with bows and arrows, spears, swords, and clubs, with or without iron tips. The tips of the sharp weapons were often covered with a vegetable poison derived from a shrub of the Strophanthus species. Some of the men also carried guns after firearms were introduced among the Mossi from the desert region and from the coast. Many carried rawhide shields.

As soon as the village contingents had assembled and had gathered their provisions, they marched to the district centers. Then they proceeded either to the place of battle or to Ouagadougou. In the latter case, they became part of the royal army and were joined by the forces of those princes who were prepared to honor their obligation to the Mogho Naba. For example, when the French invaded Ouagadougou in 1896, the Boulsa Dim sent his prime minister "at the head of an army to aid Mogho Naba